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Academics' Perceptions on Their Profession

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Abstract

In recent years, knowledge-based society and economic structures have changed the academics' responsibilities, assignments, work definitions, activities they participate and sufficiency. Therefore it is thought that these changes affect "academicianship" concept in Turkey. In this context, the object of this study is to determine academics' perceptions on their professions. Content analysis, which is one of the qualitative research approaches, is used in the study. Data were collected from 81 academics working at universities in Istanbul via open-ended questionnaire form, which includes three themes: (i) advantages of their profession, (ii) disadvantages of their professions, (iii) their professions' side that should be developed.

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1. Introduction

Increasing number of well-qualified academic staff is the leading component to reach modern education level and to raise well-qualified citizens (Yükseköğretim Kurumu, 2014a). Turkish national policy is determined that people should be well educated; therefore, especially since 2007, it's supported to establish new universities. Now, in Turkey, there are 184 universities, and 141.674 academic staff working at these universities (YÖK, 2014b). This number of academic staff is increasing gradually.

It's important to know academic staff's perception on their profession and their needs in order to enhance higher education system. University academic staff is now responsible for so many kinds of assignments such as researching, teaching, guiding students, conducting projects etc. Recording to report published by Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu (Turkey Higher Education Council), academic staff works mostly on the purpose of gaining money instead

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of raising well-qualified people, researching, conducting project, etc. When in 2001 a professor gained in the amount of 14 pieces of 7,016-gram Turkish gold, s/he gained approximately 4 pieces of 7,016-gram Turkish gold in 2013. It's obviously seen that academician's salary decreases gradually (YÖK, 2014b).

Kaygusuz (2009) indicates that Turkish government does not consider democratic rights of people who do not agree with government and also compress them. Correspondingly, academic staff also stays out of politics and contemporary issues in Turkey. Not following the agenda of the country, it's out of the question scientific development.

Financial support is also a big problem for academicians to develop their selves and to conduct a research. Lots of academic staff covers their scientific researches and meetings' expenditure. So many academicians share their office with others. For example, there are office rooms of 10 in Marmara University at which is one of the universities this study conducted.

2. Object of Research

The object of this research is to present academicians' perceptions on their profession regarding advantages of their profession, disadvantages of their profession and requests and suggestions for profession to be developed.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

The working group of the study consisted of 81 academic staff employed at Yıldız Technical University and Marmara University in Istanbul. Research instrument was delivered via both hand and e-mail to all of the staff in faculty of education at Marmara and Yıldız Technical University.

3.2. Procedure

In this study, qualitative research method was used to describe the perceptions of academic staff. Qualitative questions were formed as short and open-ended as Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011) state. Completing the instrument took 10 minutes.

3.3. Data collection tools

'Structured Interviews' were used as data collection tool. 3 open-ended questions were asked to academicians regarding advantages of their profession, disadvantages of their profession and requests and suggestions to develop the profession. 'Content Analysis Technique' was used for analysis. Researchers used footnotes to identify participants' answers. Participants' views were classified under themes and number of the participant was referred as N=X. Some of the views were given in detail.

4. Findings

Table 1. Academicians' Perceptions on Advantages of Their Profession

Advantages	f	%
Self- development	55	68
Being together and sharing scientific knowledge with youngster	24	30
Conducting new scientific researches and contributing science	18	22
Contributing social welfare (students, people etc.)	16	20
Social prestige	14	17

Recording to Table 1, 55 of participants (% 68) stated that self-development was an advantage of their profession. 24 of them (%30) indicated being together and sharing scientific knowledge with youngsters while 18 of them (%22) referred to conducting new scientific researches and contributing science. In addition to this, 16 of 81 participants underlined contributing social welfare (students, people etc.) and 14 of them (%17) stressed social prestige as the advantages of academicianship.

X₁: My profession requires thinking, reading as well as teaching and disseminating what I read and learn. When I come across a problem, it gives me a chance to create a solution instead of crabbing. I think there is no way for me to be useful for the others and myself.

Table 2. Academicians' Perceptions on Disadvantages of Their Profession

Disadvantages	f	%
Low income	34	42
Necessity to work at home	21	26
Workload density	17	21
Assignments blocking social life	16	20

As shown in Table 2, 34 of the participants (%42) stressed that primary disadvantage of academicianship is low income. Necessity to work at home was also one of the disadvantages for 21 of the participants (%26). While 17 of them (%21) emphasized workload density, 16 of them (%20) underlined assignments blocking social life.

X₂: My profession does not satisfy me economically.

X₃: Working hour is so long.

Table 3. Academicians' Requests and Suggestions for Profession to Be Developed

Requests and Suggestions	f	%
Increasing income	38	47
Enhancing workplace and conditions	17	21
Supporting academic researches	16	20
Defining objective criterions for academic promotion	12	15

It's indicated in Table 3 that 38 of the participants (%47) suggested making income increase for profession to be developed. Enhancing workplace and conditions was one of the suggestions of 17 participants (%21). 16 of 81 (%20) participants referred to supporting academic researches in order to develop profession. 12 of them (%15) stated that it was important defining objective criterion for academic promotion.

X₂: I suggest increasing salary of academic staff in addition to supporting them to develop their selves financially and also in sense.

X₃: It's important for me enhancing workplace.

5. Discussion

In analysis phase, each theme is categorized under sub-themes according to academicians' perceptions on their profession. Frequency and percentage of perceptions, which are subsumed under themes, are presented. The research shows that academicians working at universities have both positive, and also negative perceptions on their profession. Advantages of their profession are categorized in five sub-themes as self-development, being together and sharing scientific knowledge with youngsters, conducting new scientific researches and contributing science, contributing social welfare and social prestige. The views of disadvantages of their profession are subsumed under four sub-themes as low income, necessity to work at home, workload density, and assignments blocking social life. The theme revealing their professions' sides, which should be developed, are categorized in four sub-themes: defining objective criterions for academic promotion, supporting academic researches, enhancing workplace and conditions, increasing income. To sum up, academicians evaluate academic and working conditions sub-themes both as positive and negative and developable sides of their professions.

Being a scientist requires following current issues in the world in addition to belief in lifelong development. The results of study shows that a big amount of academicians (%68 of them) stated that self –development was a chance their profession bestowed them.

Academic staff working at universities in Turkey works both as a researcher and also a lecturer. Accordingly, the results of study show that being together and sharing scientific knowledge with youngsters is an important advantage for academicians as well as conducting new scientific researches and contributing science. Additively, some social advantages such as contributing social welfare and social prestige are also worthwhile advantages for participants of the study.

As stated the report titled “Türkiye’de akademisyenlerin özlük haklarının mevcut durumu ve özlük haklarının iyileştirilmesi raporu (Report on academicians’ personal rights and enhancing these rights in Turkey)” (YÖK, 2014b), academicians’ income has decreased for many years. In this study, almost all of the participants remarked low-income status as the most important disadvantages of academicianship. Since this problem is a big difficulty for science to develop, recently government has stated after so many years that academicians –especially research assistants- will get a rise to their salary. This statement looks promising for Turkish scientific development.

As seen in the results of the study, workplace and conditions prevents academicians to study and produce. Especially in public universities, academic staff works in impeding conditions. In order to enhance higher education system, it's vital to offer sufficient conditions to produce.

Recording to academicians, if their income is raised, academic studies and researches are supported, workload system are standardized and equalized, higher education system will be more qualified.

6. Conclusion

As is seen in the results of the study, although academicians deal with so many difficulties in Turkey, they like their profession in terms of many advantages. According to study results, the suggestions for Turkish science to develop are presented below:

- Academicians’ income status should be increased.

- Academicians' workplace and conditions should be organized as a productive workplace.
- Academic staff should be supported financially and encouraged to produce more and more.
- Academic criteria for academic promotion should be redefined objectively.
- Academicians' job definition should be reformed.

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